



Accountability - A-F School Report Cards

Request

The Arizona Department of Education (the Department) requests \$1,400,000 for FY18, and an additional 3.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees, to support the implementation of a more robust and transparent state A-F Report Card accountability system.

Background

A.R.S. § 15-241, requires the Department to compile an annual achievement profile for each Arizona public school and local education agency (LEA). The annual achievement profile is used to determine a school and LEA classification based on the Arizona A-F letter grade system, which is subsequently included on the school report card prescribed in A.R.S. § 15-746.

Arizona's school and district accountability system exists to:

- Provide information to parents, educators, policy makers, and education community about school performance;
- Establish comparability and evaluation of different school choice options statewide;
- Prompt and support improvement where needed; and
- Protect taxpayer investments in education.

The Department's Accountability office measures the impact and effectiveness of the hundreds of millions of dollars in state and federal investments to schools and districts entrusted to provide a high quality education for all students. Lack of systematic and reliable accountability prevents meaningful evaluation and meaningful information about the quality of the educational opportunities throughout Arizona.

Since Arizona leads the nation in school choice and innovation, the Department must effectively differentiate and appropriately support various school types, including traditional district brick and mortar schools, traditional charter brick and mortar schools, district and charter online schools, alternative/credit recovery schools, etc. Arizona's school choice and innovation environment requires a strong accountability system and substantial support. Additionally, high stakes associated with school district accountability determinations have increased significantly over the past year, placing additional responsibility, liability, and expectations on the Department. Numerous statutes—including several passed during the 2016 legislative session—depend on the data produced by the Department's Accountability office about school performance, including charter authorizers monitoring the academic performance of authorized schools, as prescribed in state law and recently adopted by the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools. These collaborative efforts have reduced the administrative burden on schools, as well as reduced cost to taxpayers, but have increased the dependencies on the Department's administration of an accountability system that is fair and consistent.

The current *azreportcards.com* website has serious potential to be the credible source of information for multiple school quality indicators; however, the current school report cards provide only limited information and, likewise, only meet minimum requirements for reporting, which is ineffective and insufficient in a true school choice system.

Justification

The Department previously implemented state and federal accountability requirements, as prescribed in A.R.S. § 15-241 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, on a budget of less than \$350,000, using existing data systems and development resources front-loaded in prior fiscal years. The sunset of Arizona's Student



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Accountability Information System (SAIS) as of FY17, and the demand for a new A-F calculation for FY18, requires a complete overhaul of the Department's existing Accountability IT processes, A-F report cards platform, and increased programmatic implementation responsibilities.

The Department's Accountability section will use the requested funds to increase the utility and transparency of the state and federally-mandated accountability system, through updated, timely, and more comprehensive school report cards, recalibrating current secure reports based on the state's new student information system, and increasing customer service and support for all impacted stakeholders, during the transition to a new accountability system and A-F letter grades.

New federal and state laws require the Department to make a variety of information, currently collected from school and districts, available to communities, policy makers, and parents, through annual school report cards. Dedicated FTE and funding for Accountability allows the Department to demonstrate the practical value of significant investments, such as student information systems and high-quality assessments, while also providing more information to parents and communities, beyond performance on standardized tests. Lack of reporting capacity starves schools, communities, and policy makers from the wealth of information about more comprehensive school-quality measures. The SBE, educators, and educational community demand timeliness, accuracy, and innovative measures of school quality, which require additional resources, to meet the high-stakes and high-profile responsibilities entrusted to the Department.

Lack of resources has limited the Department's ability to provide the level of transparency and support stakeholders demand and deserve. For example, any deviations in calculating A-F letter grades for schools, such as those identified for manipulating student test data, has resulted in delays of up to a year for some letter grades, due to scarce resources and multiple responsibilities within the program area. The Department's Accountability office needs dedicated FTE and resources, to ensure a smooth transition and implementation of new A-F letter grades and more-comprehensive and informative school report cards mandated in SB1430 (Laws 2016, Chapter 226) and set to begin in FY18.

Operation Cost

FTEs:	3.0 FTE
PERSONAL SERVICES:	\$290,000
ERE:	\$104,000
PROFESSIONAL & OUTSIDE SERVICES:	\$26,000
TRAVEL:	\$10,000
OPERATING:	\$540,000
DEVELOPMENT COSTS:	\$430,000
TOTAL:	\$1,400,000